

CHAPTER XII

THE VOICE

Oh, there is something in that voice that reaches
The innermost recesses of my spirit!

—LONGFELLOW, *Christus*.

The dramatic critic of The London *Times* once declared that acting is nine-tenths voice work. Leaving the message aside, the same may justly be said of public speaking. A rich, correctly-used voice is the greatest physical factor of persuasiveness and power, often overtopping the effects of reason.

But a good voice, well handled, is not only an effective possession for the professional speaker, it is a mark of personal culture as well, and even a distinct commercial asset. Gladstone, himself the possessor of a deep, musical voice, has said: “Ninety men in every hundred in the crowded professions will probably never rise above mediocrity because the training of the voice is entirely neglected and considered of no importance.” These are words worth pondering.

There are three fundamental requisites for a good voice:

1. Ease

Signor Bonci of the Metropolitan Opera Company says that the secret of good voice is relaxation; and this is true, for relaxation is the basis of ease. The air waves that produce voice result in a different kind of tone when striking against relaxed muscles than when striking constricted muscles. Try this for yourself. Contract the muscles of your face and throat as you do in hate, and flame out “I hate you!” Now relax as you do when thinking gentle, tender thoughts, and say, “I love you.” How different the voice sounds.

In practising voice exercises, and in speaking, never force your tones. Ease must be your watchword. The voice is a delicate instrument, and you must not handle it with hammer and tongs. Don't *make* your voice go—*let* it go. Don't work. Let the yoke of speech be easy and its burden light.

Your throat should be free from strain during speech, therefore it is necessary to avoid muscular contraction. The throat must act as a sort of chimney or funnel for the voice, hence any unnatural constriction will not only harm its tones but injure its health.

Nervousness and mental strain are common sources of mouth and throat constriction, so make the battle for poise and self-confidence for which we pleaded in the opening chapter.

But *how* can I relax? you ask. By simply *willing* to relax. Hold your arm out straight from your shoulder. Now—withdraw all power and let it fall. Practise relaxation of the muscles of the throat by letting your neck and head fall forward. Roll the upper part of your body around, with the waist line acting as a pivot. Let your head fall and roll around as you shift the torso to different positions. Do not force your head around—simply relax your neck and let gravity pull it around as your body moves,

Again, let your head fall forward on your breast; raise your head, letting your jaw hang. Relax until your jaw feels heavy, as though it were a weight hung to your face. Remember, you must relax the jaw to obtain command of it. It must be free and flexible for the moulding of tone, and to let the tone pass out unobstructed.

The lips also must be made flexible, to aid in the moulding of clear and beautiful tones. For flexibility of lips repeat the syllables, *mo—me*. In saying *mo*, bring the lips up to resemble the shape of the letter O. In repeating *me*, draw them back as you do in a grin. Repeat this exercise rapidly, giving the lips as much exercise as possible.

Try the following exercise in the same manner:

Mo—E—O—E—OO—Ah.

After this exercise has been mastered, the following will also be found excellent for flexibility of lips:

Memorize these *sounds* indicated (not the *expressions*) so that you can repeat them rapidly.

A as in May.	E as in Met.	U as in Use.
A “ Ah.	I “ Ice.	Oi “ Oil.
A “ At.	I “ It.	Ou “ Our.
O “ No.	O “ No.	OO “ Ooze.
A “ All.	OO “ Foot.	A “ Ah.
E “ Eat.	OO “ Ooze.	E “ Eat.

All the activity of breathing must be centered, not in the throat, but in the middle of the body—you must breathe from the diaphragm. Note the way you breathe when lying flat on the back, undressed in bed. You will observe that all the activity then centers around the diaphragm. This is the natural and correct method of breathing. By constant watchfulness make this your habitual manner, for it will enable you to relax more perfectly the muscles of the throat.

The next fundamental requisite for good voice is

2. Openness

If the muscles of the throat are constricted, the tone passage partially closed, and the mouth kept half-shut, how can you expect the tone to come out bright and clear, or even to come out at all? Sound is a series of waves, and if you make a prison of your mouth, holding the jaws and lips rigidly, it will be very difficult for the tone to squeeze through, and even when it does

escape it will lack force and carrying power. Open your mouth wide, relax all the organs of speech, and let the tone flow out easily.

Start to yawn, but instead of yawning, speak while your throat is open. Make this open-feeling habitual when speaking—we say *make* because it is a matter of resolution and of practise, if your vocal organs are healthy. Your tone passages may be partly closed by enlarged tonsils, adenoids, or enlarged turbinate bones of the nose. If so, a skilled physician should be consulted.

The nose is an important tone passage and should be kept open and free for perfect tones. What we call “talking through the nose” is not talking through the nose, as you can easily demonstrate by holding your nose as you talk. If you are bothered with nasal tones caused by growths or swellings in the nasal passages, a slight, painless operation will remove the obstruction. This is quite important, aside from voice, for the general health will be much lowered if the lungs are continually starved for air.

The final fundamental requisite for good voice is

3. Forwardness

A voice that is pitched back in the throat is dark, sombre, and unattractive. The tone must be pitched forward, but do not *force* it forward. You will recall that our first principle was ease. *Think* the tone forward and out. Believe it is going forward, and allow it to flow easily. You can tell whether you are placing your tone forward or not by inhaling a deep breath and singing *ah* with the mouth wide open, trying to feel the little delicate sound waves strike the bony arch of the mouth just above the front teeth. The sensation is so slight that you will probably not be able to detect it at once, but persevere in your practise, always thinking the tone forward, and you will be rewarded by feeling your voice strike the roof of your mouth. A correct forward-placing of the tone will do away with the dark, throaty tones that are so unpleasant, inefficient, and harmful to the throat.

Close the lips, humming *ng*, *im*, or *an*. Think the tone forward. Do you feel it strike the lips?

Hold the palm of your hand in front of your face and say vigorously *crash*, *dash*, *whirl*, *buzz*. Can you feel the forward tones strike against your hand? Practise until you can. Remember, the only way to get your voice forward is to *put* it forward.

How to Develop the Carrying Power of the Voice

It is not necessary to speak loudly in order to be heard at a distance. It is necessary only to speak correctly. Edith Wynne Matthison's voice will carry in a whisper throughout a large theater. A paper rustling on the stage of a large auditorium can be heard distinctly in the furthestmost seat in the gallery. If you will only use your voice correctly, you will not have much difficulty in being heard. Of course it is always well to address your speech to your furthest auditors; if they get it, those nearer will have no trouble, but aside from this obvious suggestion, you must observe these laws of voice production:

Remember to apply the principles of ease, openness and forwardness—they are the prime factors in enabling your voice to be heard at a distance.

Do not gaze at the floor as you talk. This habit not only gives the speaker an amateurish appearance but if the head is hung forward the voice will be directed towards the ground instead of floating out over the audience.

Voice is a series of air vibrations. To strengthen it two things are necessary: more air or breath, and more vibration.

Breath is the very basis of voice. As a bullet with little powder behind it will not have force and carrying power, so the voice that has little breath behind it will be weak. Not only will deep breathing—breathing from the diaphragm—give the voice a better support, but it will give it a stronger resonance by improving the general health.

Usually, ill health means a weak voice, while abundant physical vitality is shown through a strong, vibrant voice. Therefore anything that improves the general vitality is an excellent voice strengthener, provided you *use* the voice properly. Authorities differ on most of the rules of hygiene but on one point they all agree: vitality and longevity are increased by deep breathing. Practise this until it becomes second nature. Whenever you are speaking, take in deep breaths, but in such a manner that the inhalations will be silent.

Do not try to speak too long without renewing your breath. Nature cares for this pretty well unconsciously in conversation, and she will do the same for you in platform speaking if you do not interfere with her premonitions.

A certain very successful speaker developed voice carrying power by running across country, practising his speeches as he went. The vigorous exercise forced him to take deep breaths, and developed lung power. A hard-fought basketball or tennis game is an efficient way of practising deep breathing. When these methods are not convenient, we recommend the following:

Place your hands at your sides, on the waist line.

By trying to encompass your waist with your fingers and thumbs, force all the air out of the lungs.

Take a deep breath. Remember, all the activity is to be centered in the *middle* of the body; do not raise the shoulders. As the breath is taken your hands will be forced out.

Repeat the exercise, placing your hands on the small of the back and forcing them out as you inhale.

Many methods for deep breathing have been given by various authorities. Get the air into your lungs—that is the important thing.

The body acts as a sounding board for the voice just as the body of the violin acts as a sounding board for its tones. You can increase its vibrations by practise.

Place your finger on your lip and hum the musical scale, thinking and placing the voice forward on the lips. Do you feel the lips vibrate? After a little practise they will vibrate, giving a tickling sensation.

Repeat this exercise, throwing the humming sound into the nose. Hold the upper part of the nose between the thumb and forefinger. Can you feel the nose vibrate?

Placing the palm of your hand on top of your head, repeat this humming exercise. Think the voice there as you hum in head tones. Can you feel the vibration there?

Now place the palm of your hand on the back of your head, repeating the foregoing process. Then try it on the chest. Always remember to think your tone where you desire to feel the vibrations. The mere act of thinking about any portion of your body will tend to make it vibrate.

Repeat the following, after a deep inhalation, endeavoring to feel all portions of your body vibrate at the same time. When you have attained this you will find that it is a pleasant sensation.

What ho, my jovial mates. Come on! We will frolic it like fairies, frisking in the merry moonshine.

Purity of Voice

This quality is sometimes destroyed by wasting the breath. Carefully control the breath, using only as much as is necessary for the production of tone. Utilize all that you give out. Failure to do this results in a breathy tone. Take in breath like a prodigal; in speaking, give it out like a miser.

Voice Suggestions

Never attempt to force your voice when hoarse.

Do not drink cold water when speaking. The sudden shock to the heated organs of speech will injure the voice.

Avoid pitching your voice too high—it will make it raspy. This is a common fault. When you find your voice in too high a range, lower it. Do not wait until you get to the platform to try this. Practise it in your daily conversation. Repeat the alphabet, beginning A on the lowest scale possible and going up a note on each succeeding letter, for the development of range. A wide range will give you facility in making numerous changes of pitch.

Do not form the habit of listening to your voice when speaking. You will need your brain to think of what you are saying—reserve your observation for private practise.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What are the prime requisites for good voice?
2. Tell why each one is necessary for good voice production.
3. Give some exercises for development of these conditions.
4. Why is range of voice desirable?
5. Tell how range of voice may be cultivated.
6. How much daily practise do you consider necessary for the proper development of your voice?
7. How can resonance and carrying power be developed?
8. What are your voice faults?
9. How are you trying to correct them?